

# TINDERBOX<sup>(/)</sup> POETRY JOURNAL

## Hands Up, Don't—

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Maybe I carry animals in my pockets.  
And where you imagine I've tucked a barrel's nose,  
lies instead the wet, huffing muzzle of a beast  
untamed by my fleshwarm dark. A hunger I thumb  
through all of taxonomy to identify: fanged  
as a piranha, madder than an orphaned cub. When I disappear  
my hands into those twin wilds, they reemerge  
claw-mauled and dripping. How delicious, this agony  
like pressing a bruise to deeper blue and calling it *night*.  
Allow me, if nothing else, a moment to lap at what leaks.  
I have a certain sickness that makes me love  
my freshest stripes, and maybe I'm proud, above all, of this  
red touch. Of the way no one leaves my embrace  
with a shirt as white as it was when I first held them.  
My sternum, itself a pocket; my clavicles, threadbare  
seams.  
My gasp catches soft as lint in thick hair. When I die,  
I hope to leave behind—more than an unleaded chest—  
a viscid stain, its brassy wax. Maybe all I need  
is to know you won't walk away from me clean.

